

**Minutes of the WPARA A.G.M. held at The Nevill
Cricket Pavilion
on Monday, 19th May, 2025, at 7.30 p.m.**

1. Chairman's Welcome

Neil Williams, Chairman of WPARA, opened the meeting by thanking all those present for taking time out to attend the A.G.M. Neil then asked the Area Reps present to stand up and introduce themselves to the audience. Also, John Hill is stepping down from being an Area Rep but his replacement, Jenny Chambers, was introduced.

2. Treasurer's Report

Due to unforeseen circumstances on the London to Tunbridge Wells rail service, Justin was not able to present at the start of the meeting. Thankfully he had sent a copy of what he was going to say to Mel Richards, Secretary of WPARA, who duly read out the following:-

"These are the 2024 Accounts and cover the period 1st January-31st December. I'll be rounding the numbers but the full Accounts will be posted on the WPARA website.

We started the year with fund of £500.

Income for the year was £7,000, which was significantly higher than the 2023 income of £2,400. It was so much higher in fact that Barclays called me to do a money-laundering check! The Committee was delighted to see that 125 households paid the £20 subscription in 2024, which is 7 more than in 2023 and 8 more than in 2022 when the subscription was just £5. As ever, thanks to the Area Reps for distributing the subscription forms and collecting the money. As well as resident subscriptions, we also received very substantial donations in 2024 of £4,500 from extremely kind and generous residents. £3,600 of this was for the planter project, £750 was for a dedicated bench, and £150 was from a resident who had not been a member of WPARA previously and wanted to pay his past subs. Thank you to everyone who made a donation.

Costs for the year were £4,600. As well as the usual annual expenses, we spent £2,200 of the planter fund and £1,200 on benches – a new bench, installation and maintenance.

That gave a surplus for the year of £2,400, leading to a year end bank balance of £2,900. That includes the remaining £1,400 of the planter funds.

I'd like to say a few words about 2025 but, before I do that, can I please formally put forward the 2024 Accounts for Adoption. Malcolm Dove and Sarah Garwood approved the Adoption of the Accounts.

Looking ahead to what is happening so far in 2025, we have had about 100 households pay the subscription so far, which is a bit behind where we were this time last year. Forms at the back if any of you have neighbours that you think would like to join WPARA, or if any of you here have not paid your subscription for the year! I estimate there are 250 houses and flats in the area, so there is plenty of potential to get more people involved in WPARA and the local community.

Andy has continued driving the planter project and estimates we'll be on budget. I know we're excited about seeing the planters on the bridge after all the hard work that has gone into them.

Once costs for 2025 are taken into account, I estimate we'll have about £2,000 in the bank. The Committee will continue to look for ways that WPARA can invest in our area. If any resident has any ideas, please pass them on to your Area Reps. And with that, I'll hand back to Neil for the Chairman's Report."

3. Chairman's Report

Neil stated **"Everything takes so long!"**. Neil enquired how many people had noticed the new bin outside Tybers. It took 5 years to get it in place. It was only when Neil had spotted 2 bins 20 yards apart on Frant Road that the Council, with the help of Pamela Wilkinson agreed to reposition this one. Regarding **TWBC/KCC** - who does what? Again, with Pamelas help, the bollard on the bridge which had been skew wiff for months was straightened out. This was KCC. The website is very useful for pointing you in the right direction. **Website** - too often residents say "what website"? Malcolm Dove is always looking for items to include. **Cars parked on red tile pavements** - this has improved dramatically due to Neil putting on cars forms produced by WPARA

pointing out cars should not park on the pavements. These forms are available to all residents should they require a supply. **Drains** – residents and their gardeners should not blow leaves and other debris onto our roads. Again there has been a lot of good drain activity in the last 6 months. WPARA needs to do its bit. **Traffic Calming** - vans and company cars continue to bounce over the bumps. Now that Beckie Bruneau is no longer in power at KCC, WPARA will be continuing with efforts for 20 mph limit. Neil asked for a show of hands for those in favour –the majority around 50 in number. 4 were against. **Hedges and Trees** – Neil reported there was the odd resident who did not cut back their foliage (there is a leaflet available for this) but again this is very rare now. **Dog Owners** – the minority of dog owners who do not bag and take home their dogs waste let down the majority who do. Even more frustrating is full bags left on the pavements. Most dog owners do now respect the Nevill Cricket Ground and keep their dogs on leads. **Graffiti** – Neil reported that he had removed graffiti from the bridge and there could well be a solution to hand to deal with Upper Cumberland Walk which is a regular problem. **Spring Bulbs** – the bulbs planted 7 years ago have mainly disappeared. WPARA could use some of the money in the bank for bulbs 2025/26 but helpers would be required with the planting.

4. Traffic Calming/Parking – 20 mph Vote

The 20 mph vote had been taken earlier. Andy Evans reported that there is a review taking place for parking restrictions to be introduced between Rodmell Road and the Chicane – there are none at present. There is the possibility of alternate parking Zone for 24-40 Warwick Park where residents do not have off-street parking. Andy advised that he was in the process of creating signage asking people to park respectfully along with a QR code for the website showing other alternative parking spots.

5. Planters on the Bridge

Neil expressed WPARA's thanks to people and companies who donated towards the planters.

Andy Hempleman reported that the good news is the planters are very close to being installed. Andy advised that the planters had been bought in the summer of 2024. They are made of weathering steel and they had to be left over the winter to develop a patina. That is now largely done. There are 6 planters and they are 2 metres long and about half a metre high. The space

between the bollards on the islands on the bridge is just over 11 metres so they will have a big impact. The bridge is angled and the two islands are slightly staggered so the plan is to offset the planters in a staggered pattern. The planters will be positioned back from the bollards as the bollards keep getting driven into!. Andy reported that all the plants have been bought. They are different from the more flower focused planters around Tunbridge Wells which tend to be higher maintenance. Andy advised that inspiration had been taken from planting schemes in London (such as by St. Clement Danes on The Strand and the Coal Drops Yard area around Kings Cross) where there is some stunning landscaping and planting. The four corners of the six planters will be evergreen (Japanese spindletree, vinca, trailing rosemary and ferns) and the two centre planters will be largely grasses with some achillea and helenium. The plan is to create year round interest and have some structure as well. Andy reported that the streetworks order from KCC was expected in the not too distant future and all the plaques (showing the donors) have been made. The plaques were passed round for all those present at the meeting to see. Andy requested some volunteers for traffic management during the installation of the planters as people tend to drive through at high speed. It is hoped the planters will be installed in early June.

6. Water Management

Andy advised there were two things he briefly wanted to touch on – surface water and the state of the water companies and what it means to WPARA. Surface water problems have, hopefully, eased with KCC replacing a substantial number of drainage rates on the street. It has been quite dry since this work was undertaken but it is looking promising with no flooding at the bottom of Roedean Road in particular. Unfortunately the news is far from good with our water companies. We have two water companies – South East Water for drinking water and Southern Water for our waste. The two companies are combined in one single bill. The key issue is debt. There has been a lot of press coverage about Thames Water but we have got some serious challenges here. Southern Water is the second most indebted water company and South East Water is the third most indebted company. 27p of every £1 paid to Southern Water goes to pay that debt and for South East Water it is 26p for every £1 paid. This leaves no money for improvements for the future after salaries, maintenance costs and bonuses have been paid. The other issue is the lack of understanding of their infrastructure. Thames Water does not know where 30% of its sewage pipes are. There is one company that is worse and that is Southern Water where the figure is an incredible 40%. This may explain some of the issues we have experienced. What does this mean for

WPARA residents? **Higher water bills.** South East water price increase for this year is 12%. For Southern Water it is 52%. Overall more than 30%. **More supply issues.** There have already been several interruptions. The infrastructure is collapsing and leaks are out of control. South East Water pump 520 m litres a day. Unfortunately, 110 m litres go straight down the drain. Overall leakages are going up, despite a threat from the regulator, OFWAT and fines for not meeting targets. **Delaying road refurbishment.** There have been lots of repairs in the area but unfortunately to a very poor standard. Four repairs have been undertaken to the same pipe on Warwick Park and Rodmell Road. Two repairs shortly after each other. If the road is being dug up on a regular basis, there is no point in lobbying to get it resurfaced. The only way for WPARA to get any change is to lobby Mike Martin, our MP. Andy reported that he was going to try and get a meeting with Mike Martin to go through all the above in more detail. Andy advised that he had asked residents to send information if any water issues were experienced but, to date, he has received none. Andy requested no rants but he did need photos, dates, reports etc. if residents experienced problems. Andy advised that he would like to thank a couple of individuals on behalf of WPARA. Justin Cook at KCC who has kindly waived the fees for moving the planters and Pamela Wilkinson for her help in getting the bin moved and supporting the 20 mph limit.

7. Planning Applications

Malcolm Dove reported that the planning application for flats in the car park at the lower end of Warwick Park had been rejected. It is a case and see what the applicant's next move will be Malcolm advised that the homeowners of No. 5 Warwick Park are in a legal dispute with the applicants over part of the land that the owners of the car park thought was theirs.

Sarah Garwood reported on the Rugby Club Development. The basic proposal by Esquire was for 360 – since February, 2025, now 400 – homes to be built alongside a nursery facility and 70 bed retirement property. It involved four parcels of land, one of which is the Rugby Club and is within Kent. The remaining three are in Wealden which means Wealden has control of the planning process and, whilst they will refer to TWBC for their views, will make the ultimate decision. Wealden also has control of the planning for the site in Bunny Lane where it is proposed the Rugby Club relocate to. The current position is:-

1. Esquire submitted applications to TWBC and Wealden for confirmation that they did not need to submit an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) for the parcels of land. Wealden agreed very early on and TWBC agreed in December, 2024.

2. In February, 2025, Esquire applied for a further exemption as they were proposing to increase the homes built to 400, so objectors got a second bit of the cherry to object. This has been done – e-mail to TWBC by Daniel Dzenkowski of 16th February, 2025. As yet, no decision has been made but looking at KCC responses from the Flood & Water Management Dept. and Minerals & Waste. They have said they are happy to await the full Application before commenting. Highways seem to be saying that the scale of the development needs a TA (Transport Assessment) within and EIA.

3. TWBC has yet to make a decision on the February, 2025, application.

4. No full Application has been submitted to either Wealden or TWBC to date. WPARA is unable to comment on any of the applications made to Wealden but apparently Frant residents are very active.

In Tunbridge Wells there seem to be several interested groups:

1. Frant Road Safety Group

2. 'Objection to Rugby Club Development' – on WhatsApp – admin is Sharon Hunt

3. Green Weal Alliance – also on WhatsApp. Emma Van Rooyan is the admin but the main driver of this group is Daniel Dzenkowski. The group is keeping records of road accidents in the area, bird life, schools and their capacity etc. – a general talking shop at the moment.

Sarah advised that there was a meeting at 6.00 p.m. on Friday, 25th April, 2025, at The Bull on Frant Road – a 'community meeting' where they were hoping to get proposed KCC Councillor candidates for Tunbridge Wells South to attend. This was being arranged by Emma and Ton. Sarah had no updates on this meeting.

8. Tunbridge Wells Council

Tony Pawson (retired Chairman of WPARA who represents WPARA for planning applications).

Tony expressed the view that he considers TWBC still, and continues to do so, listen to what WPARA has to say about planning applications affecting our area. Tony opened by explaining about the Town Forum and the demise of TWBC and the implications for WPARA.

CURRENT SITUATION:-

1. Currently our Local Government consists of three levels: Kent County Council (KCC), Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and Parish or Town

Councils such as Rusthall or Southborough within the Tunbridge Wells Borough.

2. The Labour Government is introducing a new system based on Integrated Unitary Authorities including other Agencies such as transport, health and social care under an elected Mayors as well as Local Government – the London, Birmingham etc. model.

3. As part of that change, District and Borough Councils will be abolished and their functions – for example Planning and Licensing – being incorporated into the new Unitary Authority, and others devolved to enhanced Parish and Town Councils. Proposals for Kent from KCC have to be with the Government by the end of November.

THE PROBLEM:-

4. The problem for the residents of Central Tunbridge Wells is that, unlike for example Sevenoaks, or even Southborough, we do not have a Town Council to represent our local community's interests and take on any devolved functions!

5. What we do have is a non-statutory or informal organisation called the Town Forum which has representatives on it from a number of local organisations, including the WPARA among others such as the Civic Society and The Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons.

THE SOLUTION

6. The obvious solution is to form a Town Council covering the 6 unparished wards of central Tunbridge Wells. This is the proposal being developed under the auspices of the Town Forum

7. Forming a Town Council has two components:

- (a) A formal legislative process to establish it; and
- (b) Reaching agreement with KCC/new Unitary Authority on its functions.

DECISIONS FOR WPARA

8. Whether to publicly support the Establishment of a Town Council for central Tunbridge Wells and, if so, also to seek to maximise its authority.

9. That is the formal position and Tony expressed that he was happy to go into more detail and try to answer questions, but his own personal view, and also that as Secretary of the Friends of the Commons, is that it would be absurd NOT to have a Town Council:-

a. We would be disenfranchised compared with other areas and lack a direct voice in shaping local services and decisions; and who would run local services such as public loos, the Camden Centre or Crematorium or co-ordinate views to influence the Unitary Authority;

b. All the Council Tax we pay to Tunbridge Wells Council would go to the Unitary Authority to spend as THEY decided across the whole of their area. This includes what is called the "Special Expenses" element of it, around £2.5

million spent on the Tunbridge Wells area, largely on parks and town facilities, such as public toilets etc. Without a Town Council, there is no ability to organise or retain some of this for local use;

c. For the Warwick Park area specifically, the future of the Conservation Area with its planning protections and the uses of the land owned by TWBC, including the Nevill, are a particular concern;

d. Finally, there are also intangible but important considerations: the sense of identity, of belonging somewhere by having a representative Council, and there are commercial and cultural benefits from having a “Royal” appendage.

10. Tony put forward one final question:- “I understand that Town Councils have the option of being so-called “non-political” in the sense that political affiliation is not put on the ballot papers. In my experience, quality of local representative is more important than their Party. Would WPARA members favour this?”

Neil asked for a show of hands and the majority favoured the proposal.

9. WPARA Website - www.WPARA.co.uk

Neil introduced Malcolm Dove to the meeting. Malcolm oversees the Website and deals with the Neighbourhood Watch e-mails. Malcolm advised that residents could contact him if they had information/ideas they would like to be shared on the Website.

10. Any Other Business

Orla Finn reported that the Tunbridge Wells Tennis Club were looking into the possibility of putting in planning permission to have paddle courts installed, some grass courts removed and more flood lights installed. An e-mail had been sent to Club Members advising a meeting is to be held on Tuesday, 27th May, 2025, at 6.00p.m. to discuss the outlined proposals and planned Planning Application submission. Orla advised that she would monitor the situation and report back with developments.

Caroline Hutt advised that Solar Panel sales people keep hounding her household. Caroline enquired what the situation was regarding Solar Panels in a Conservation Area? Tony reported that he thought visibility and location would be the question asked.

Neil welcomed Justin West to the meeting and enquired whether anyone at the meeting had any direct question for Justin regarding the Accounts – none. Malcolm expressed thanks to Neil and Mel for their hard work on behalf of WPARA.

11. Residents’ Questions there were none!